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YELLOWING OF CENTIPEDE GRASS AND ITS CONTROL

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Centipede grass is one of the important lawn grasses in the South and particularly in Florida. For light sandy soil it is better adapted than Bermuda grass, and it makes a thicker and firmer sod than St. Augustine grass. In fact centipede grass seems to be more aggressive and perhaps better adapted to high, sandy soils than any other lawn grass yet tried in Florida.

Although centipede grass has some very desirable qualities, it sometimes develops certain yellow discolorations, technically known as chlorosis, even in well kept lawns. This yellowish color has been accepted by some as being a characteristic of the grass itself. Such varied colored lawns are not attractive. The plants in many of the yellow patches continue to appear sickly and decline and finally die.

SYMPTOMS

The yellow discoloration, or chlorosis, occurs irregularly over the centipede lawn. The yellowish color seems to be more outstanding on some blades of the grass than others. This is very noticeable in the early stages, while the advanced stages show a pale yellow to almost white color (see photograph).

This yellowing is different from brown patch of lawn grasses, which is caused by a fungus. With brown patch the plants are killed in circular patches, leaving a brown color. But the yellowing of centipede grass does not develop a circular brown patch, even where the grass dies. With severe cases of yellowing the under runners or stems die, leaving the dead sod almost free of soil. The yellowing may occur in sparsely sodded areas and during rapid stages of growth.

CONTROL TREATMENT

Inasmuch as the grass in advanced stages of yellowing often dies, even in well kept lawns, it appeared from casual observation that the trouble was due to a fungous disease. But careful examination revealed no causal organism. This yellowing also resembled nitrogen starvation in places, but treatment with various forms of nitrogen fertilizer in combination with phosphorus, potassium and calcium, showed no response.

On the other hand, spraying the grass with a dilute solution of iron sulfate produces a normal green color within 8 days (see photograph).

The influence of iron sulfate on improving the color of centipede grass in lawn. The dark areas or strips indicate where the iron sulfate solution—1 teaspoonful per 2 gallons of water—was sprinkled on the yellow grass. Photo made 10 days after treatment. (Photo by G. F. Weber.)

It is important that the iron be in soluble form because the yellow colored plants are deficient in iron for normal growth and metabolism. The dry salt applied directly to the grass will burn the plants, and should not be used.

The most practical form of iron is the sulfate, or "copperas", which can be secured from any drugstore. When this salt is sprayed on the yellow colored areas of grass at the rate of 1 teaspoonful of powder to two gallons of water (sufficient for 5 or 6 square yards of lawn) the grass will turn green within a few days. The salt should be dissolved and sprayed on the grass immediately, since upon standing in water it tends to become insoluble.

This treatment is no substitute for fertilizer in nitrogen starved lawns, nor will it revive dead lawns, but it is a control for the yellowing due to iron deficiency. It is seldom necessary to make two applications per season. Spraying when the symptoms are first noted gives more effective control.